

MEMORIES OF ROCK HILL

by WALTER L. LINGLE, D.D., LL.D.



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Centenary of the Church
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Editor's Note: Dr. Walter L. Lingle (1868-1956) was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill, South Carolina, from 1902 until 1907. When the Church celebrated in 1944 the seventy-fifth anniversary of its organized ministry, Doctor Lingle, the only living former pastor, was invited to participate in the historical observance. He delivered the following address on the evening of November 10, 1944. The original manuscript was obtained from Doctor Lingle by Miss Frances Gregg and deposited in the archives of the Church. The address is being printed for the first time in 1969 in connection with the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the organization of the First Presbyterian Church.

A portion of the cost of publication has been defrayed by Dr. Samuel Reid Spencer, Jr., successor to Doctor Lingle in the presidency of Davidson College and grandson of Dr. J. William Thomson (1863-1938), professor and dean of Winthrop College, Rock Hill. Doctor Thomson is mentioned several times in the Lingle reminiscences.



PREACHED my first sermon as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Rock Hill, on June 8, 1902, and my last sermon on February 24, 1907. In the years that elapsed between those dates I have many happy memories. In fact, I can think of only happy ones.

Perhaps you will be interested in the steps that led to my coming to Rock Hill. My first pastorate was in Dalton, Georgia, about twenty miles from Chattanooga. I took my bride there. We were married on January 2, 1900. In September, 1900, the church at Dalton gave me leave of absence for six months that I might go to Union Seminary in Richmond to teach Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation. As we were returning to Dalton about April 1, 1901, I stopped over at my old home, nine miles west of Salisbury, for a few days. The old home was occupied by my widowed mother and my youngest sister and her husband, who was at that time seriously ill. Prior to his illness he had erected a granary in the barnyard and had it all ready to cover. I concluded that I would cover it for him during my visit. So I donned my overalls and went to work. While I was thus engaged, two gentlemen drove up in a buggy (those were the horse and buggy days). The gentlemen turned out to be Mr. John R. Barron, president of the Manchester Cotton Mill in Rock Hill, and Dr. J. W. Thomson, professor in Winthrop College. I crawled down off the roof and asked what I could do for them. They said they were looking for a minister named Reverend Walter L. Lingle. When I informed them that I was he, they sat there in the buggy in open-eyed astonishment. They did not know exactly what to say. However, I think Mr. Barron promptly fell for a minister who could nail shingles on a sloping roof without falling off. They informed me of their mission and inquired whether I would be willing to consider a call to Rock Hill. I told them that I could not, as I felt under moral obligation to return to my church in

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Dalton, as they had so graciously given me six months' leave of absence. I returned to Dalton and the committee approached other ministers. I am not sure but that the Church called one or two other men, but they did not come. In the late summer the committee approached me again, but I told them that I could not consider a call. In the fall the Church called me right out of the blue without asking. I wrestled and prayed over that call for nearly two weeks, and felt led to decline. Then telegrams came asking me to reconsider. Those telegrams shook me somewhat. I recall that I laid them before Mrs. Lingle and asked for her advice.

Now Mrs. Lingle would never vote when a call came. I could never discover what she thought. She was not like the wife of a minister concerning whom I heard this story. The minister had a call and was wrestling over it. Someone asked the minister's young son what his father was going to do about the call. The son replied, "I don't know. Father is up in the study praying about it, but Mother is downstairs packing up." When I laid those telegrams before Mrs. Lingle and asked for her advice, she inquired whether I had received any new light on the subject. When I answered in the negative, she replied that I had wrestled and prayed over the matter before giving my answer, and she thought that unless there was new light that I should let the decision stand. This I did, but I said at the time that if the Church ever called me again right out of the blue, I would take it as an indication that the Lord wanted me to go to Rock Hill. The Church turned to another man but did not get him, and then, in the early spring, the Church called me again without consulting me. I felt sure that the Lord wanted me to go. That is how I came to be pastor of the First Church, Rock Hill.

Our first night in Rock Hill was spent in the home of Miss Mary White, one of the pillars of the Church, a Christian in whom there was no guile. We slept upstairs in a room that was known as the "prophet's chamber." It was modeled somewhat after the prophet's chamber described in the Bible. Many distinguished ministers had slept in that room in Miss Mary White's home. There was on the wall a scroll bearing the autographs of many ministers who had slept there. Among them I recall such names as Dr. J. H. Thornwell, the great theologian, and Dr. B. M. Palmer, the great preacher, and there were other great names. I felt that I was on holy ground.

I recall what a warm welcome the people of Rock Hill showed us, and it was shown not only in words, but in deeds. One little touch will illustrate what I mean. We arrived the first week in June. There was an excellent lot for a garden connected with the Manse. Somebody had gone to work in the early spring, planted a vegetable garden, and cared for it. Thus it was all ready for use when we arrived. I was informed that Mr. Tom Flowers was largely responsible for making and working the garden.

Nobody ever had better neighbors than we had. There were the Ben Fewells on one side of the Manse and the Ed Roddeys on the other side. Across the street from the Manse were the Friedheims, the Ratterrees, the Frel Mobleys, and the James Reids. All of these

and others were wonderful neighbors. We remember that Mrs. Ben Fewell sent over to the Manse some delicious muffins for our first breakfast.

I also remember the fine way in which the elders, deacons, Sunday School workers, and members of the Church in general cooperated with the pastor during the whole of my stay in Rock Hill. I did not have the experience of a colored preacher of whom I had heard. He came to his white friend and told him that he was in deep trouble. When his white friend asked him what it was, he replied: "You see this is my third year. The first year my people idolized me, the second year they tantalized me, and the third year they are scandalizing me."

A church can make or break a preacher. Dr. John Watson, who wrote under the pen name "Ian Maclaren," and was the author of *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush*, tells of his experience along this line in one of his books. When he had completed his theological education, he accepted a call to a small church in the Highlands of Scotland. He soon became very much discouraged. He had a way of forgetting his sermons in a very embarrassing way. One day after he had forgotten his sermon and was about ready to quit the ministry, one of the Highland elders said to him, "Don't be discouraged when you forget your sermon. Give out a hymn or psalm, and while we are singing you will be remembering your sermon, and we will be loving you and praying for you." Dr. Watson said it was encouragement like that that made him a minister. I suspect that if your former pastors could testify, they would all bear witness that the Church helped them to be what they afterward came to be.

I remember how the Winthrop students used to come to the First Church. Some came on the little street car, drawn down Oakland Avenue by two mules. The majority of them walked. I suppose the distance was a full mile. Girls could still walk in those days! I once heard Will Rogers say that the present generation has ridden in automobiles so long that it winds them to walk to the garage. I also remember that some of the old-timers did not want Winthrop students put in the pews, and we finally had to put them all in the old Sunday School room to the right of the pulpit. Perhaps some of the saints do not yet realize what a church is for.

I remember, too, how the ministers of the town took it Sunday night about preaching in Winthrop College chapel. My records show that I preached there thirty-eight nights during my stay in Rock Hill.

Dr. D. B. Johnson, president of Winthrop College, used to send a colored man and a phaeton after the ministers when they preached in the Winthrop chapel. The colored man was always interesting company. He was especially interested in the Associate Reformed Presbyterians, and could not quite make out who they were. He put it this way: "Reverend, who are these Associate Reformed Presbyterians? I never heard of them until I came to Rock Hill. In fact, I didn't know that Presbyterians ever reformed."

I remember that a man who was not very well known and his little daughter, aged about ten, used to sit on the back seat of the Church. He was a quiet, reserved man. When I learned that he was not a professing Christian, I spoke to him a time or two about becoming a Christian, but he seemed to be unmoved. Then one Sunday, when the invitation was given, his little daughter came forward and made a profession of faith. The next Sunday, when the invitation was given, the little daughter took her father by the hand and led him forward to the place where the session was meeting. "A little child shall lead them."

I also remember when a young usher became amused at something as he was about to show a dignified couple to their seats. He came down the aisle in a broad smile that was almost audible. The next day some of his friends were teasing him about it. When there was a pause, Mr. J. Edgar Poag, of blessed memory, asked, "What's the harm in smiling a little on your road to heaven?" The Christian religion is not a smile-if-you-dare kind of religion.

I wonder whether the older people remember when a half-dozen cats or more took possession of the Church one night during service? They seemed to be in every part of the Church at once. When an usher put a cat out of one door, another cat entered another door. We had to pause until the Church could be cleared of cats and the doors closed. It happened this way: Captain and Mrs. W. L. Roddey, who lived on Main Street about opposite the Church, were away on a visit for some days. Their granddaughter, Marion Roddey, came by the old Roddey home to feed the cats on her way to church. They were evidently lonely, and the whole family of cats followed her to church.

Miss Orrie Steele used to sing in the choir of the First Church of Rock Hill. She tells this story. One Sunday when the pastor was absent, Rev. S. C. Byrd, the very solemn and dignified president of Chicora College, filled the pulpit of the First Church. While he was making the long prayer, a cat came down the aisle, walked up into the pulpit, and snuggled down into the minister's chair and went to sleep. Certain members of the choir and congregation did not have their eyes closed; and when they saw the situation, it did not take much imagination to see what the direful consequences would be when the minister concluded his prayer and attempted to resume his seat! So there was tense excitement! But to their great relief, or disappointment, when Doctor Byrd had concluded his prayer, he spied the cat and took another seat.

I remember the first time I ever met your present pastor, Dr. Francis W. Gregg, while I was pastor of the First Church. Colonel Coward, the head of The Citadel, brought the Citadel students to Rock Hill for an encampment of a week or ten days prior to their commencement. They camped around the old Presbyterian High School, which was located where the Winthrop Training School now stands. Doctor Gregg, a graduate of The Citadel, was invited to come to Rock Hill and preach the commencement sermon on June 28, 1903. When the time for the service arrived on that Sunday morning, Doctor Gregg and I were at the Church, all ready to begin, but there was not a Citadel student in sight. At the last moment,

a messenger arrived with a note from Colonel Coward saying that owing to the inclement weather (it was misting a little) he would not bring his young soldiers to church that morning, and requesting Doctor Gregg to preach the commencement sermon in the Winthrop chapel that night. That left us in a pretty predicament! Doctor Gregg's sermon, which had been especially prepared for the Citadel students, was not quite suitable for a general congregation. Besides, he had to save it for that night. He looked at me, and asked if I could preach. I replied in the negative, saying that I had preached all my sermons to that congregation. I suggested that he retire to the little room behind the pulpit, where the organ now stands, and try to recall the last sermon he preached, while I would remain in the pulpit and conduct that part of the service which comes before the sermon. I think I threw in an extra hymn or two. When the time for the sermon arrived, I tapped on the door, and Doctor Gregg came out with his text and preached a good sermon! I have admired and loved him ever since.

I remember my friendship with Mr. J. J. Hull, editor of the *Rock Hill Herald*. Although he was a Roman Catholic, he was always very cordial to me, and always wanted my sermon in condensed form for the *Herald*. Then one day he sent for me to come to his home. When I arrived, he told me that the doctor had informed him that he had Bright's disease and would probably never be out again. As there was no Catholic priest in Rock Hill, he had sent for me to ask me to be his pastor during his illness. I had many sweet visits to his home. He always insisted that the whole family should come into his room, and that I should read the Bible and have a prayer. As the end drew near, he sent for me early one morning. When I reached his home, he asked if I would be willing to meet a Catholic priest from Charlotte at his home that night at six o'clock. This I agreed to do. When I went back at six o'clock, he told me that the priest had come and gone. He had asked the priest whether he would be willing to conduct his funeral in coöperation with a Protestant minister. When the priest replied in the negative, he told the priest that he need not come back again. Then he asked me whether I would be willing to conduct his funeral. Of course, I told him that I would and that I would be glad to do anything that lay in my power for him or his family. That experience as Mr. Hull's pastor is one of the most distinct and one of the sweetest of all my memories connected with Rock Hill.

I remember a Thanksgiving dinner at our home which was a little out of the ordinary. We decided to invite some of the elderly women from the Highland Park section. I invited them in person. One of the old ladies declined. When I pressed her for her reason, she replied that she did not how to act. I assured her that we were not going to have any acting, and finally persuaded her to come. She was seated by me at the table. As I arose to carve the turkey and others were busy talking, she confided in me why she did not want to come. She was left-handed and was sure that she would look very awkward at our table. I asked her to look and see in which hand I was holding my carving knife. When she saw that it was in my left hand, her face beamed, and from that time on she was perfectly at ease. Sometimes it is a real asset to be left-handed.

I remember that as we were at lunch one day we observed a stranger dressed in a Prince Albert coat and a silk hat coming up the walk to the Manse. He turned out to be the Reverend Doctor Warden of Philadelphia. Doctor Warden was Secretary of Sunday School and Home Mission Work of the Presbyterian Church, USA (Northern Church). I wondered what he was doing in Rock Hill. The Negro Synod of the Presbyterian Church, USA, was due to meet in Rock Hill that night. There had been some friction between Doctor Warden's board and the Negro Synod, and he had come to Rock Hill to meet with the Synod to see if he could straighten out matters. He said he had never been South before and knew very little about the Negro. I took him to the Negro Presbyterian church and showed him over it with considerable pride. I then took him to the home of the pastor, Rev. Mr. Young, who was sick abed. He was very cordial to Doctor Warden, but said that he was in a quandary. Synod was meeting in his church and he was not well enough to attend that night, but hoped to be by the next day. Not only so, but the Moderator was detained by sickness, and there was nobody to preach the opening sermon. A committee had gone to the train to meet the incoming ministers to see if a preacher could be found. As Doctor Warden and I were leaving, the committee returned, saying that they had not been able to secure a preacher. I suggested that they invite Doctor Warden to preach the opening sermon. They jumped at the suggestion, and Doctor Warden was invited. Doctor Warden went back to the hotel and I went home.

The next morning about ten o'clock I dropped in on the Synod. A debate was raging around the differences that existed between the Synod and Doctor Warden's board. A colored minister, who had been brought up in Detroit, was excoriating Doctor Warden and his board. The moment I went in, Brother Young, who had recovered sufficiently to attend, arose to a question of personal privilege. The speaker yielded the floor. Brother Young said that when the white Synod met in the First Church of Rock Hill, Doctor Lingle had introduced him as a Christian brother, and that he did not want a moment to elapse before he introduced Doctor Lingle to their Synod. I was properly introduced and called on to make a speech. In response I made a few remarks. When I was through, an elderly colored minister arose, presented a written motion covering the matter at issue between Doctor Warden's board and the Synod, and moved that it be passed by a rising vote. This was promptly done. The minister from Detroit never said another word. Doctor Warden's face lighted up. He said that if he had written that motion himself it could not have pleased him better. It settled the matter. His work was done. As he and I walked away, he said that he must tell me something. When he had arrived in Rock Hill the morning before, he was utterly at a loss as to which way to turn. In his perplexity he knelt by his bed to ask the Lord for guidance. He had uttered only two or three sentences when the thought came that the wisest thing to do would be to go to see the white minister, whoever he might be. He took that as an answer to his prayer and came straight to the Manse. Then he said, "See how the Lord has used you without your knowing it!" He sent me sundry periodicals and other literature from his office as long as he lived.

I remember when a swarm of bees came down Main Street and

settled on the upper door facing of the front door of Friedheim's Department Store. Mr. Arnold Friedheim became greatly excited. Those bees were not helping business. The problem was to get someone to hive them. Finally Mr. S. S. Plexico and the colored janitor of the First Presbyterian Church undertook the job. They armed themselves with bag, broom, water, and smoke, and proceeded. By that time the whole town seemed to be lined up on the opposite side of the street to watch the performance. I remember how many suggestions were made and how much advice was offered by the spectators. Everyone seemed to know more about hiving bees than the men who undertook the job. That incident has always been a parable to me. Spectators on the sideline always know more about how to do a particular job than the man who is actually doing it.

I remember when the Chamber of Commerce gave a big banquet and invited businessmen from York, Chester, Lancaster, and other places. It was a big affair with two or three hundred present. The banquet was served at tables that would seat about a dozen each. They served real punch that night. I did not touch mine, and out of deference to the cloth nobody at my table touched his. Some sharp-eyed lawyer at another table saw what was happening at my table, and good-naturedly chided my table companions. With that start the matter became the talk of the town. The Methodist minister who was not present said that I should have arisen, made my protest, got my hat, and gone home! Mr. I. Blumberg, the Hebrew jeweler, stated the situation finely. He remarked to me afterwards, "They did not do you right nor the banquet. If they were going to have the preacher, they ought not to have had the punch. If they were going to have the punch, they ought not to have had the preacher." When I grew enthusiastic about his statement of the case he said, "Please don't say anything about it. It might hurt my business."

I have a very distinct recollection of the meeting of Bethel Presbytery at Jefferson back in the horse and buggy and wagon days. We went by train to Heath Springs. When we arrived at Heath Springs, I observed that the brethren were in a great hurry to get off the train, but for the moment I did not see the reason why. But I quickly saw it when I got on the outside. The people of Jefferson and community had met us with buggies, phaetons, and two-horse wagons. Those who got off the train first commandeered the buggies and phaetons, and left the wagons for those who got out last. The procedure was hardly in keeping with the scriptural injunction "in honor preferring one another." It fell to my lot to ride on a plank thrown cross the body of a two-horse wagon. The distance from Heath Springs to Jefferson, if my memory serves, is eighteen miles over very ordinary country roads. We ground through the sand for hours. The last two miles of the road had been newly made by blasting out stumps, and there were holes in the road. The wagon wheel dropped into one hole after another, and that plank on which I sat had no springs in it. That night they put me in the same home, same room, same bed with a fine elder from York County. As we were getting ready for bed, he explained to me that there were eight children in his home, and that it had fallen to his lot for years to sleep with the next youngest one, while the mother looked after the youngest. During those years he had learned automatically to reach over

in his sleep and feel to see whether the child was covered up. He expressed the hope that if he followed the procedure with me that night I would not be annoyed. It struck me as extremely funny, but it wasn't! All through the night I would be startled out of my sleep from time to time by his hand passing carefully over me. It was very little sleep that I got. The next morning at eleven, Dr. S. H. Hay, pastor at Clover, preached. Within five minutes after he had taken his text I was sound asleep. Then I dreamed that I was sitting on that plank in the wagon, and that the wagon wheel dropped into a hole. As a result, I stood right straight up in the church. Thus I disgraced the First Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill, of which I was pastor. But the circumstances were extenuating!

The Presbytery appointed me on Sunday morning to preach at McBee, twenty-five miles from Jefferson. Very early Sunday morning before I could get any breakfast, Mr. Sowers appeared with a little mule hitched to a big buggy, with big wheels and hubs, to drive me to McBee. Again we ground through sand for hours. It was eleven-thirty when we reached McBee. We were met at the door of the church by an officer, who said that they had already sung the hymnbook through, and that I could take my text and go ahead with the sermon.

I am telling about this trip to McBee because of a remarkable story Mr. Sowers told me on the way. As he drove along, he called my attention to a heap of stones near the road, and said that they marked the place where a Federal soldier belonging to General Sherman's army was killed. The soldier had been sent out to forage for horses and mules. At one farm he took so many horses that he could not manage them all, and impressed a young Negro slave into his service to help him, promising him freedom. When the soldier and the Negro arrived at the point marked by the heap of stones, the soldier evidently being weary left the Negro in charge of the horses in this secluded place and lay down by a log and went to sleep. As the Negro brooded over the fact that this Federal soldier had stolen these horses from his master, his heart burned within him. When he could stand it no longer, he picked up a club, killed the soldier, and took the horses back to his master. The authorities of the Federal army declined to believe this story. They could not believe that a Negro on his way to freedom would kill the man who was freeing him. The army officers, accordingly, arrested a number of elderly men in the community, took them to camp, and cast lots as to which one should be shot as a reprisal for the soldier's death. The lot fell on the most devout Christian in the community. Twenty years later I met an elder from Jefferson at the General Assembly and asked him if this were a true story. He said that it was, and that he had heard the Negro, when he was a very old man, tell the story in detail.

I remember when the movement to build Oakland Avenue Church began. In January, 1907, I accepted a call to the First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, and at a congregational meeting the First Church of Rock Hill voted to concur with me in my request to Presbytery to release me that I might go to Atlanta. A few days after this congregational meeting, Mr. J. M. Cherry, a deacon, came to my

home, told me of the need of a new church up near Winthrop College. He thought the best time to agitate this would be while the Church was without a pastor. So he wanted me to present the matter to the congregation before leaving Rock Hill. Then he got me in his buggy and drove me all over Rock Hill, listing the Presbyterian homes. He believed that there were a sufficient number of Presbyterians east of the railroad to support the First Church and a sufficient number west of the railroad to support a new church. That journey over Rock Hill with Mr. Cherry made a deep impression upon me, and I decided to present the matter to the congregation. I tabulated a good many facts about the situation in Rock Hill. Then I studied places like Charlotte and Columbia, where churches had or had not colonized, and showed the results. Incidentally, I may say that at that time the First Presbyterian Church had the largest membership of any Presbyterian Church in South Carolina. The First Church of Greenville came next, and after that the First Church of Columbia. On January 27, 1907, I took for my text Deut. 1:6—"Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount--." With this as my text, I presented as strongly as I could the need of a new church in the Oakland section near Winthrop College. A month later I went to Atlanta. Shortly after Dr. Alexander Martin became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill, he wrote and asked me if I would send him the manuscript of that sermon with its statistics. This I gladly did. He led the movement for building the Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church.

There are several sacred and yet beautiful pictures in my memory in connection with death. About two o'clock one night I was called up and asked to go to the bedside of a boy of thirteen or fourteen years who was very ill. He did not belong to one of the families of our church, and I am not sure that I remember his name. When I reached his bedside, he was perfectly conscious and very calm. When I asked him if he had any special request to make, he replied that the doctor had told him that he had only a few hours to live, and he wanted me to read the Bible and pray with him. He did not seem to be that near death. He was as calm as if he had been about to start on a short journey. As I read the twenty-third Psalm and the fourteenth chapter of John, he said, "How beautiful! How beautiful!" About five o'clock he passed on to the Father's house. That experience has been one of the beautiful pictures in my memory through all the years that have passed.

Another beautiful picture remains in my memory. One evening the elders of the church were invited to take supper at Professor J. W. Thomson's up near Winthrop College. Afterwards, there was a meeting of the session. When we adjourned, a cold wind was blowing, and snow was falling. Major A. H. White and I walked toward home together at a rather rapid gait. When we came to the parting of the ways, about two blocks from his home, and two or three blocks from the Manse, we bade each other a pleasant good-night. I had not been at home ten minutes when the telephone rang, and Mrs. White asked me to come at once and said that Major White had suddenly passed away. When I arrived, Major White was sitting in his chair in front of the sitting room fire, looking as if he were asleep. Mrs. White, who was alone with him, was perfectly composed and serene. When he reached home, he had taken his seat in front

of the fire to warm after his chilly walk. While he and Mrs. White were talking, he suddenly stopped and in the twinkling of an eye was gone. Perhaps most of us, if we had been in Mrs. White's place, would have lost our control and collapsed. I shall never forget her faith and serenity. Her bearing has been an inspiration to me through the years. Something like forty years has passed, but the whole inspiring picture is as distinct in my mind today as it was that first night.

The time came for us to leave Rock Hill. I shall never forget the kindness of the people in those last days. The Church gave me a beautiful Tiffany watch, which is my most prized possession. It has done many a deed of mercy. You see, I keep it on the pulpit every time I preach; and it never fails to tell me when it is time to stop. I usually try to heed its warning.

Quite a group accompanied us to the depot in that last hour. They said many kind things as we waited for the train. I do not remember their exact words, but I do remember the impression that was left on my heart. However, I remember one precious sentence that was spoken. As we grown-ups were busy talking, a girl of ten or twelve from the industrial section of the town made her way through the grown-ups, took me by the hand, looked up into my face and said, "I am sorry you are leaving. You led me to Jesus." Those were about the most precious words that were ever spoken to me. I only wish that I had made it possible for a great many more people to say that to me.



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